

Influence of Selected Socio-Cultural Factors on Girls' Enrolment and Retention in Public Secondary Schools in Mandera Central Sub-County, Mandera County, Kenya

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Abstract: Disparities in access to education translate to disparities in benefits derived from investment in education in both individual and societies. If the disparities are not addressed then the goals of equity and efficiency will not be achieved. Disparities in enrolment and retention on the basis of gender and region are attributable to socio-cultural factors. This study aimed at establishing the extent to which selected socio-cultural factors influence enrolment and retention of girls in public secondary schools in Mandera Central sub-county. This study was based on Liberal Feminism Theory by Wollstonecraft. The theory primarily focuses on women's ability to show and maintain equality through their own actions and choices. It advocates for equal rights of boys and girls towards education. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data. Reliability of the instrument was established as 0.85 which is above 0.70 acceptable threshold for social science studies. Data was collected from 8 principals, 44 class teachers, 200 girls and two key informants. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data. The study established that socio-cultural factors influence enrolment and retention of girls in public secondary schools in Mandera Central sub-county and that the disparities between boys and girls are attributable to preference of boy child, early marriages and pregnancies, inadequate role models and domestic chores. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the parents and community at large should be sensitized on the importance of girls education, more female teachers and administrators to act as role models and enhance guidance and counseling for girls.

Keywords: Influence, Socio-cultural, Enrolment, Retention

1. Introduction

Educating women is beneficial at national, community, family and individual level. Education aims at supporting girls to become confident, self-reliant, competent and productive members in society (World Bank, 2007).

Sub-Saharan Africa records the highest gender disparities in Secondary education with 8 million boys enrolled compared to only 6 million girls with very low Gross Enrolment Rate of 24% for girls and 31% for boys, (UNESCO, 2011). Gender disparities against girls are highest in Benin, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, and Togo, with fewer than 60 girls per 100 boys entering secondary education. These disparities are as a result of non-enrollment and dropping out of school attributed to constraints within families, constraints within society, religious constraints, policies of school systems and education practices (UNESCO, 2012).

International reports for example the EFA Global Monitoring Report UNESCO (2003) indicate that there is gender disparity observed in access and retention at all levels of education in marginalized areas in Kenya; Samburu, Wajir, Garissa, Mandera, Turkana, Moyale, Tana River, Isiolo and Marsabit. Mandera and Turkana exhibit huge gender gaps. This is despite the introduction of Free tuition secondary Education and other interventions like in-school feeding programme, girls' re-entry programme, bursary schemes and sponsorship among others. A pastoral area like Mandera County still faces inequality and disparities in education between boys and girls (Republic of Kenya, 2007).

Enrollment of boys in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL), Mandera Central sub-county inclusive has been higher than that of girls throughout the years (Orodho, 2014). The enrolment of girls is still low despite the affirmative action to enroll more girls in secondary schools. The low enrollment of girls is well illustrated by Secondary Gross Enrollment Rate by gender in selected counties for the year 2015, presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Secondary Gender Enrollment Rate in Selected Counties

County	Gross Enrollment Rate (GER)	
	Boys	Girls
Kisii	97.9%	86.2%
Embu	94.7%	90.3%
Kiambu	85.1%	87.8%
TaitaTaveta	81.6%	81.0%
Garrisa	29.1%	10.9%
Mandera	14.5%	5.2%
Marsabit	19.2%	12.7%
Samburu	25.3%	14.6%
Turkana	16.9%	7.7%

Source: MOEST, 2015 Basic Education Statistical Booklet

The analysis in Table 1 indicates that Kiambu and Taita Taveta counties had the GER of over 80% for both boys and girls for the year 2015, while counties like Turkana, Garrisa and Mandera had low GER of below 15%, with Mandera County having the lowest GER of 5.2% for the girls for the year 2015.

The enrollment rates for the period of study 2009-2019 by gender presented in Table 2, confirms the disproportionate

enrollment rates between boys and girls in secondary schools in Mandera Central sub-county.

Table 2: Mandera Central sub-county Public Secondary Schools Enrollment in Percentages by Gender 2009-2015

	Boys	Girls
2009	78.6	21.4
2010	79.2	20.8
2011	76.5	23.5
2012	77.6	22.4
2013	73	27
2014	72.4	27.6
2015	67.9	32.1
2016	62.7	37.3
2017	64.2	35.8
2018	69.9	30.1
2019	67.1	32.9

Source: Office of the sub-county Director of Education, Mandera Central, 2015

The observation from Table 2 indicates that the enrollment of boys has been higher than girls throughout the years. For instance, in the year 2009 enrollment of girls was 21.4% against 78.6% for the boys and in the year 2019, girls' enrollment was 32.9 percent against 67.1 percent for the

boys. On average, the enrolment rate for the girls is about 30% while that of the boys is 70%. The low enrollment rates therefore show that there is a problem with girls' education in the sub-county that needs to be established (Office Director of Education, Mandera Central sub-county, 2019). This calls for the need to find out the factors contributing to this low enrollment of girls.

The government has had a lot of input into girl child education through FPE and tuition FDSE in order to improve the enrollment and retention rates all over the country. This is the basis for this paper to establish the extent to which selected socio-cultural factors have contributed to low enrollment and retention in public secondary schools in Mandera Central sub-county.

2. Results and Discussion

The study sought to establish the stakeholders' perceptions on the influence of selected socio-cultural factors on the enrolment of girls in public secondary schools in Mandera Central sub-county. The results obtained are shown in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively.

Table 3: Class Teachers' Perception on the Influence of Selected Socio-Cultural Factors on Enrollment of Girls in Public Secondary Schools

Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1. More boys than girls are enrolled in secondary school because parents prefer to educate boys	46.0	48.0	0.0	4.0	2.0
2. The number of girls enrolled is low because my community does not value education of girls.	12.0	64.0	2.0	20.0	2.0
3. In polygamous families parents prefer investing on boys and this affects enrolment of girls in secondary schools.	20.0	48.0	12.0	14.0	6.0
4. FGM affects enrolment of girls in secondary schools	24.0	12.0	10.0	42.0	12.0
5. Early marriage affect girls' enrollment in schools.	36.0	48.0	8.0	2.0	6.0
6. Teenage pregnancies affect enrollment of girls in secondary schools	12.0	44.0	16.0	8.0	20.0
7. Lack of role models affect enrollment of girls in schools.	34.0	36.0	12.0	10.0	8.0
8. Sexual harassment affects girls' enrollment in schools.	12.0	16.0	12.0	24.0	36.0
9. Enrolment of girls in secondary schools is low because of the tendency of families to assign them domestic Responsibilities	22.0	28.0	18.0	26.0	6.0
10. The reluctance of the community to invest on girls with disabilities affect their enrolment in secondary schools	42.0	16.0	4.0	36.0	2.0

Table 4: Students' Perception on the influence of Selected Socio-cultural Factors on Enrolment of Girls in Public Secondary Schools

Statements	Frequency	Percentage %
1. More boys than girls are enrolled in secondary school because parents prefer to educate boys.	130	76.5
2. The number of girls enrolled is low because the community does not value education of girls.	125	73.5
3. In polygamous families parents prefer investing on boys and this affects enrolment of girls in secondary schools.	124	72.9
4. FGM affects enrolment of girls in secondary schools	72	42.3
5. Early marriage affect girls' enrollment in schools.	150	88.2
6. Teenage pregnancies affect enrollment of girls in secondary schools	70	41.2
7. Lack of role models affect enrollment of girls in schools.	150	88.2
8. Sexual harassment affects girls' enrollment in schools.	70	41.2
9. Enrolment of girls in secondary schools is low because of the tendency of families to assign them domestic responsibilities	150	88.2
10. The reluctance of the community to invest on girls with disabilities affect their enrolment in secondary schools	112	65.9

From Table 3, 96% of the class teachers and 76.5% of the students from Table 4 indicated that more boys than girls are enrolled in public secondary schools because parents prefer to educate boys. In addition, 87.5% of the principals and

100% of the key informants interviewed also agreed that most parents prefer educating the boy child than the girl child and this affects enrolment of girls. The principals expressed their views that low expectations made of the girls

by some parents in the community reduce their confidence and desire to remain in school. One of the key informants explained that some parents prefer to educate a boy because a girl may get pregnant and drop out of public secondary school leading to wastage of money. This agrees with Global reports by UNESCO (2008) which indicate that in developing countries such as Somalia, there are strong preferences for boys than girls when it comes to formal education. This scenario is similar to South Africa where boys are given priority to go to school compared to girls (UNESCO 2011).

Further, from Table 3, 64.0% of the class teachers and 73.5% of the students from Table 4 agreed that the number of girls enrolled was low because the community in the area under study does not value education of girls. It also shows that majority of the class teachers (68%) and students (72.9%) agreed that in polygamous families, parents prefer investing on boys and this affects enrolment of girls in public secondary schools. In addition, 75% of the principals and 100% of the informants during the interviews further pointed out that boys are favored because they are perceived as the breadwinners in future and therefore should be molded by getting education. This agrees with a study carried out by UNESCO (2010) in Pakistan shows parents have less value attached to education of girls compared to boys.

Table 3 shows that 36.0% of the class teachers consented FGM affects enrolment of girls in public secondary schools. From Table 4, 42.3% the students agreed that FGM is a contributing factor to low enrolment of girls. From the interview, 100% of key informants pointed out that FGM is carried out on some girls during puberty and therefore most girls are not enrolled in public secondary schools but get prepared by their mothers how to become future wives. One of the key informants expressed *“girls themselves reject schools as soon as they have been submitted to initiation ceremonies which officially confer the status of adult onto them.”*

In relation to the findings on FGM, The Kenya Demographic and Survey Data (KDSD, 2014) shows that 96% of women have been circumcised. It also points out those girls aged 5-9 years are more likely to be circumcised than girls aged 10-14 years. This therefore implies that most girls are circumcised at their early schooling years and this affects their continuity with secondary learning once they decide to get married after the circumscion.

Class teachers (84.0%) from Table 3 and students (88.2%) from Table 4 agreed that early marriage affects girls' enrolment in public secondary schools. From the interview carried out on the principals, 8(100%) of the principals agreed that early marriage is factor affecting enrolment of girls. These high percentages show that early marriage is a hindrance to enrolment of girls in public secondary schools in Mandera Central sub-county. This finding is supported by Orodho (2014) who established that forced early marriage of the girl child in most pastoralist communities" constraint

education of the females compared to their male counterparts. This finding agrees with Aftin (2014) who found out that girls are booked for early marriage and some parents use their daughters as sources of wealth through such kind of marriage.

From Table 3, 56.0% of the class teachers and 41.2% of the students from Table 4 pointed out that teenage pregnancy contribute to low enrolment of girls in public secondary schools. Principals (100%) when interviewed pointed out; no teenage mother is willing to go back to school due to mockery from elderly women and other girls who have already dropped out of school One key informant supported this statement and further explained *“those girls who get pregnant cannot come back to public secondary school because of fear of mockery from other students especially the boys, about breastfeeding and caring for young ones while in school”*. This contradicts Kenyan government policy already in place for re-admission of teenage mothers into the school system and therefore the head teachers are mandated to re-admit teenage mothers (MOEST, 2005).

Lack of role models affects enrolment of girls in public secondary schools as supported by 70% of the class teachers and 88.2% of the students as shown in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively. This was also supported by 100% of the principals who reported that their public secondary schools had fewer female teachers and some public secondary schools did not have even one female teacher. These findings are in line with Solotaroff (2007) who found that in Afghanistan, lack of female teachers is an obstacle to girls' participation and enrollment in schools. This also agrees with (Otieno, 2006) who found out shortage of female teachers to act as role models influences enrollment of girls in school.

From Table 3, 50% of the class teachers agreed that enrolment of girls in public secondary schools is low because of the tendencies of families to assign them domestic responsibilities. In addition, 88.2% of the students from Table 4 perceived that domestic responsibilities assigned to girls affect their enrolment in public secondary schools. The 2 key informants(100%) revealed that girls carry out many domestic roles compared to boys like taking care of siblings and sick relatives, looking after animals, fetching firewood and water and looking after animals. This implies that they are considered as home care givers and therefore no need to go to school. This affects enrolment of girls in secondary schools. In an African traditional setup domestic role is an activity for females in the family as revealed by Malenche (2006) and further explains that domestic gender roles for girls are numerous and they do not give them opportunities to go to school.

The study also sought to establish the class teachers' and students' perceptions on influence of selected socio-cultural factors on retention of girls in public secondary schools in Mandera Central sub-county. Results obtained are shown in Table 5 and Table 6 respectively.

Table 5: Class teachers’ Perceptions on Influence of selected socio-cultural factors on Retention of Girls in Public Secondary schools

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1. Most girls do not complete secondary four year cycle because parents prefer education of boys	38.0	38.0	16.0	6.0	2.0
2. The community does not value education of girls and therefore girls do not complete secondary school	52.0	20.0	14.0	12.0	2.0
3. In polygamous families parents prefer investing on boys and this affect retention of girls in secondary schools	16.0	44.0	12.0	26.0	2.0
4. FGM affect retention of girls in secondary schools.	24.0	20.0	10.0	26.0	20.0
5. Early marriage affects girls' retention in schools.	44.0	26.0	10.0	18.0	2.0
6. Teenage pregnancies affect retention of girls in secondary schools	64.0	18.0	8.0	6.0	4.0
7. Lack of role models affect retention of girls in schools.	44.0	32.0	10.0	12.0	2.0
8. Sexual harassment affects girls' retention in schools.	28.0	24.0	18.0	16.0	14.0
9. Retention of girls in secondary schools is low because of the tendency of families to assign them domestic Responsibilities	60.0	18.0	12.0	8.0	2.0
10. The reluctance of parents to invest on girls with disabilities affect their retention in secondary school	42.0	14.0	10.0	22.0	12.0

Table 6: Students’ Perception on influence of Selected Socio-Cultural Factors on Retention of Girls in Public Secondary Schools

Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Most girls do not complete secondary four year cycle because parents prefer education of boys	120	70.5
2. The community does not value education of girls and therefore girls do not complete secondary school	120	70.5
3. In polygamous families parents prefer investing on boys and this affect retention of girls in secondary schools	130	76.4
4. FGM affects retention of girls in secondary schools.	90	52.9
5. Early marriage affects girls' retention in schools.	160	94.1
6. Teenage pregnancies affect retention of girls in secondary schools	155	91.2
7. Lack of role models affect retention of girls in schools.	160	94.1
8. Sexual harassment affects girls' retention in schools.	87	51.2
9. Retention of girls in secondary schools is low because of the tendency of families to assign them domestic responsibilities	150	88.2
10. The reluctance of parents to invest on girls with disabilities affect their retention in secondary school	100	58.8

Results from Table 5 and 6, shows that 76% of the class teachers and 70.5% of the students respectively concurred that most girls do not complete the four year secondary cycle because parents prefer the education of boys to that of girls. Similarly they pointed out that the community does not value education of girls and therefore girls do not complete secondary school education. The principals (100%) and (100%) of the key informants when interviewed concurred with the class teachers and the students. These findings agree with those of Adams (2013) who established in his study that parents regard educating a girl child as poor investment because the girl will get married and benefit her husband’s home.

Table 5 shows that 44% of the class teachers agreed on FGM affecting retention of girls in public secondary schools while 46% disagreed. Table 6 shows 52.9% of the students pointed out FGM is a factor influencing retention of girls in public secondary school. One of the informants revealed that female circumcision is done at puberty, which brings with it additional traumas due to unhealthy connotations and sexual overtones associated with it. It has rituals which are so demeaning to the girls. It is at this stage that girls perceive

schooling as a waste of time because many start getting prepared for marriage. This finding concurs with Gachiri (2001) who found out that FGM contributes to girls dropping out before completing their secondary education.

From Table 5, 70% of the class teachers and 94.1% of the students from Table 6 agreed that early marriage affects girls' retention in public secondary schools. From the interview carried out 100% of the principals agreed that early marriages affects retention of girls in public secondary schools. The two key informants revealed that influence from the girls who have already dropped out of school and have been married off and maybe doing well in their marriages, makes the schooling ones dropout of public secondary schools too. One key informant explained further *“the girls are provided with all their requests before a wedding and that they will get husbands who will take care of them and therefore consider schooling as a waste of their time”*. This agrees with Harl (2011) who established that early marriages affects retention of girls in schools.

Teenage pregnancies affect retention of girls in public secondary schools. This was supported by 82% of the class

teachers from Table 5 and 91.2% of the students from Table 6. From the interview carried out, 60.3% of the principals indicated that the girls dropped out of public secondary schools because of being ashamed of schooling while pregnant or worse still breastfeeding while schooling. This agrees with Musyimi (2011) who noted that teenage pregnancies were some of the factors that lead to dropout from school.

Table 5 shows that 76% of the class teachers and 94.1% of the students from Table 6 agreed that lack of role models affects retention of girls in public secondary schools. This was also supported by 100% of the principals who were interviewed. One of the Principals who did not have a single female teacher in his school said “*sometimes it becomes difficult for the girls to open up to male teachers when they have a personal problem especially during their menstrual cycle. This makes it difficult for them to remain in school and it therefore forces some of them to drop out*”. This finding is consistent with Kiveu (2018) who established that lack of role models leads girls to dropping out of school.

From Table 4, 78% of the class teachers and 88.2% of the students from Table 5 agreed that retention of girls in public secondary schools is low because of the tendency to assign them domestic responsibilities. The two key informants when interviewed revealed that the community believes girls are the only ones who should carry out household chores and boys are exempted to read and master the Koran at the Mosque and have time for studies. The key informants further reported that some parents believe girls should remain at home and assist taking care of siblings and their sick relatives. This implies the girls affected do not have time for studies leading poor performance. They therefore get discouraged and drop out of public secondary schools. This finding agrees with Malenche (2006) who found out that domestic gender roles for girls are numerous and they do not give them opportunities to go to school.

3. Conclusions

The parents' preference on the boy child education affects enrolment of girls in public secondary schools. They prefer investing in the education of the boy child. This implies that a low number of girls are likely to enroll and complete secondary schools education.

The socio-cultural factors practiced continue to disadvantage the girl child in terms of accessing secondary education. Early marriages and pregnancies force young girls out of school in order to take care of their husbands and children.

Assigning girls more domestic chores especially during school days implies that they do not get enough time to attend school regularly and they end up dropping out before completing secondary education. It is clear that if girls are taken to boarding schools they will have more time for their studies because they will be saved from more domestic chores.

4. Recommendations of the Study

In light of findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- a) Community women should be enlightened more on the negative aspects of the cultural practices like forced early marriages that deny them their freedom and their rights as women. This will make them encourage their girls to complete secondary education by shunning cultural practices that disadvantage them.
- b) Guidance and counseling to be carried out regularly by female role models in schools to encourage and motivate the girls to understand the importance of being in school and completing their secondary education. The parents too should actively participate in guiding and counseling their girls.
- c) The parents and the community at large should be sensitized on the importance of girl-child education through community education programmes and awareness in order for them to consider investing in the education of the girl child equitably to that of the boy child.
- d) The parents need to be sensitized on the importance of proper monitoring of the girls and assign them less domestic chores to create more time for their studies while at home.

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